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SUBJECT: FOOD SECURITY PROJECT UNDER DEVELOPMENT

¶1. On April 8, a team led by Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) Special Advisor Tesfai Tecle briefed donors on its efforts to design a project to promote food security in Zimbabwe. Tecle said that AGRA Chair Kofi Annan was approached by many Zimbabweans, including Prime Minister Tsvangirai, for help. AGRA contacted the World Food Program (WFP), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) to work jointly on a program for Zimbabwe when the opportune moment came; they decided the time was right at the end of March. Tecle led a team to Harare where the group took advantage of extensive groundwork a European Union team had carried out on food security options. Tecle noted that a joint World Bank/UN/EC Assessment Mission is now underway and said that any long term proposals would await the results of that effort. Tecle's team would draft a project proposal by the end of April and seek funding for a short-term project of input support and extension service provision to boost the principle grain harvest in May 2010.

¶2. FAO Senior Emergency Advisor for Africa Daniele Donati said that the AGRA team's proposal would target 600,000 communal farming households cultivating an average of less than a hectare each. This would reach about two-thirds of communal farmers. Initial estimates of project cost were about US\$120 million, of which US\$20-30 million was already available. If fully funded, the initiative would boost production by as much as 600,000 tons, covering well over half of Zimbabwe's food gap. However, funds would be needed by June/July, and even early funding would not ensure availability of fertilizer (with need estimated at 120,000 tons).

¶3. AGRA team members agreed with donors that dependency syndrome is a real concern and indicated they were considering ways to either recover seed costs after harvest or require some kind of community reinvestment from participants. Their bottom line, however, was that the need to avoid another massive food security shortfall in 2010 justified taking some risk of undermining market mechanisms and reinforcing subsistence farmers' expectations of input handouts. WFP Deputy Regional Director Timo Pakkala told donors that this appeal for funds would be on top of the recently launched Consolidated UN appeal for Zimbabwe which amounts to US\$567 million, of which 60 percent (or US\$340 million) relates to food security.

¶4. COMMENT: We hope that the AGRA proposal will include measures to guard against reinforcing farmers' expectations that inputs will be provided free to those who wait. Our discussions with the GOZ indicate that they favor market-based approaches to food security whenever possible. AGRA could consider introducing revolving credit or microcredit schemes to prevent dependency. We have concerns, as well, about the optimistic yields projected for rainfall dependent communal agriculture. Reference is frequently made to communal agriculture's capacity in the 1990s to feed the nation, but this was only the case in years of good rainfall. The ability to mobilize and pay for an adequate number of extension agents to quickly train 600,000 farmers is another concern, as know-how in communal agriculture has also declined.

¶5. COMMENT CONTINUED: However, we share the AGRA team's desire to reduce food insecurity following the main 2010 harvest, and we agree

with their assessment that action is needed now to avoid another lost year. This would indicate that there is a need for expanded donor coordination on the various mechanisms to address this crop cycle. We will explore ways that USG support for rural livelihoods could be coordinated with this broader project. The AGRA team's proposal addresses food insecurity at the household level, but not the elephant in the room - the challenge of resuscitating consistently high-yielding commercial agriculture that will provide long-term food security and earn foreign exchange for Zimbabwe through the export of surplus production. END COMMENT.

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